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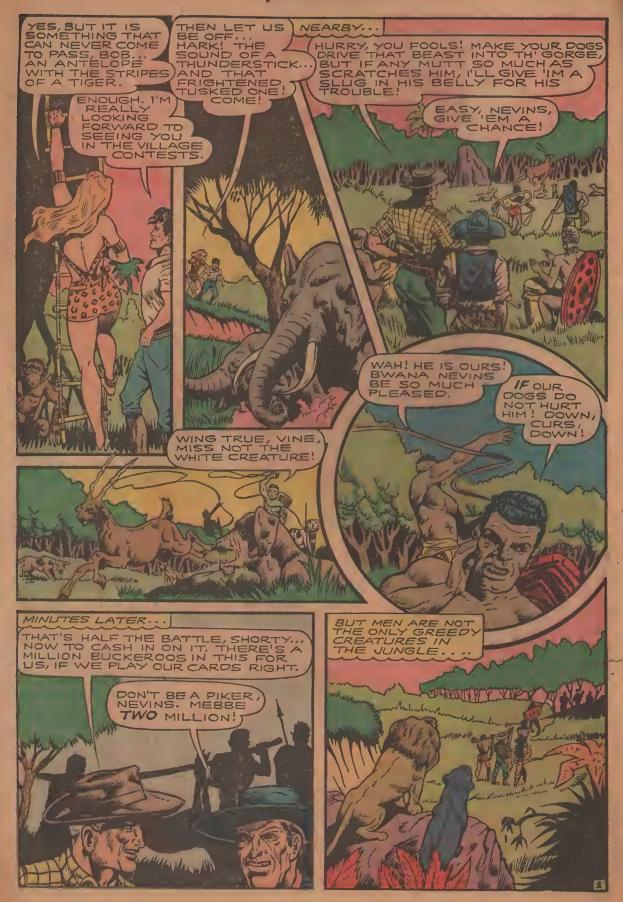


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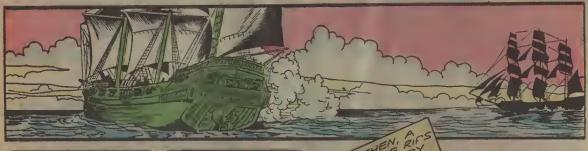














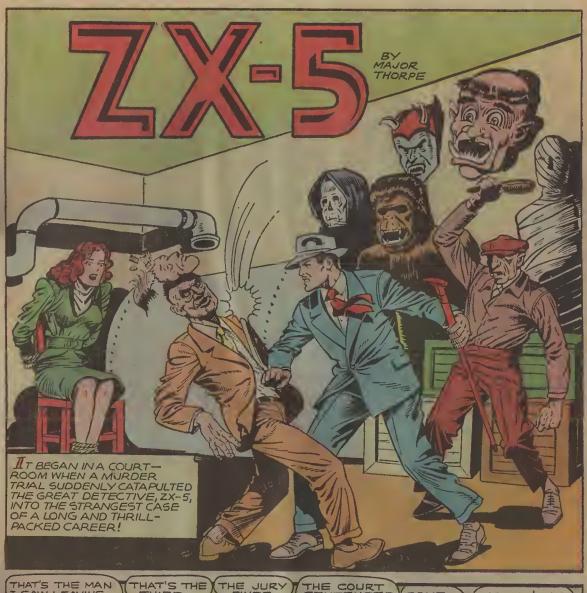


































SHEENA AND THE CLIFF DEVILS

By W. MORGAN THOMAS

SHEENA had been gone for several hours now, to confer with a party of white hunters who wished permission to cross her territory, and little Chim had begun to get restless. He crossed the tree hut to where Bob sat fashioning a bowl from a sweet smelling chunk of pine log, and pawed at the man's knee with a brown paw.

Bob smiled at the little chimpanzee. "Hah, small one! You want to leave the tree hut and go into the jungle, is that it? Well, wait until I have finished my carving and perhaps we'll go for a little jaunt. Perhaps we may even go to the cliffs . . ."

It was the carven faces, though, that most interested Bob, the faces etched long ago into the side of the cliffs by the tools of some strange and forgotten tribe. They were huge faces, stretching a hundred feet from ear to ear, and something about their grinning stone mouths bespoke of the evil they might reveal if they could talk.

Sheena never spoke of the cliffs, nor of the faces there, and she had forbidden Bob to even go, near the place. He did not think, however, that she would be angry if he satisfied his curiousity just this once. Sheena was Queen of the jungle, and her rule was not disputed, but he knew that she was just and fair in all things. Quickly and skillfully he sent his knife skimming around the lump of pine wood. He would finish the bowl, then he and Chim would have a look at the cliffs. Just one quick, harmless look before Sheena returned.

"Chi—chi—" It was Chim again, poking at Bob's knee. Possibly, had he known Bob's thoughts, he would not have been so anxious to get started. Chim would have dared not disobey Sheena, but in her absence he trusted Bob completely.

Less than an hour later, Bob, with Chim perched on his shoulder, stood on a rocky abutment and peered up in amazement at the stone faces. There they brooded, worn by

centuries of wind and water, grinning through all the years as though they knew some joke which was not intended for the ears of ordinary mortals.

"O-o-h-h Bob. Up here. Look up here!"

It was Sheena's voice!

They could see nothing. Still the voice came again, and without doubt it was the voice of Sheena.

"Up here, Bob. Inside the ear of the great grinning face. Come up, Bob. I need your help. Hurry!"

"Chi—chi—chi—" Chim was puzzled and beginning to get frightened. He clung with both arms to Bob's neck. It was not like Sheena to play such jests on her friend and mate.

"Hold on tight, Chim." Bob pressed against the rough face of the cliff, seeking for a hold by which he might begin the upward climb. Sheena had said she needed his help, and had commanded him to hurry. That was enough. Explanations could wait until later.

"Hurry, Bob, Hurry! I'm in trouble. Hurry!"

Sweat crawled on Bob's brow as he wriggled skyward, seeking desperately with his toes for a tiny ledge which would sustain him and the chimpanzee. Once he glanced down, only to experience a sickening sensation in his stomach at the sight of the canyon floor hundreds of feet below.

Then he was sliding over the smooth lobe of the stone ear. The dark passageway was just ahead and from it there came a musty, fetid smell of corruption and great age.

"In here, Bob." It was Sheena's voice again, speaking softly and from very close by. With Chim holding tightly to him, Bob stepped through the crude opening into a passageway behind the stone ear. It happened then.

Something soft and thick fell over his head, blinding and suffocating him. It seemed to be the skin of some kind of an animal. At the same instant a voice laughed cruelly and said, "Tie him up, my people. We have Sheena's mate—and soon now we shall have Sheena!"

Rough hands picked up Bob and Chim and carried them what seemed an interminable distance. When the skin was removed from his head and face he saw that he was on aledge looking down into the canyon far below. The ledge was one of the eyebrows of the great stone face. And facing Bob, with a group of stalwart warriors behind her, was a lithe, black skinned woman. Her eyes were narrow and cruel and she wore the feathered coat and skirts of a witch doctor.

"I am Malbessa!" She spoke in a high, arrogant tone. White teeth flashed in her dark face. "I rule the cliff people, and the devils in the cliffs obey me. Too long now has Sheena been ruler of the jungle, and I, Malbessa, have sworn to kill her. And you too, fool, when you have served your purpose!"

"B-but Sheena?" stammered Bob. "I heard her. She called me!"

Malbessa laughed. She raised her voice in a call. "O-o-h-h Bob. Up here!"

Bob stared. The voice was Sheena's, but it came from the black woman's throat.

Malbessa whirled on the warriors. "Tie this one up, quickly, and lower him over the ledge. Sheena shall see how I deal with those I do not like."

Bob was bound hand and foot, and with Chim still clinging dolefully to him, was lowered over the ledge by a rope slung beneath his armpits. In a second he was dangling, like a human pendulum, against the stone face and high above the canyon floor. Malbessa looked down at him and laughed cruelly. She put the edge of a knife against the rope. "When Sheena comes we shall show her that Malbessa is merciless. She shall watch you be dashed to pieces on the rocks below!"

But Bob, already racked by pain as the rope cut into him, said nothing. He was watching the cliff above the leering Malbessa, where Sheena was descending by means of her grass rope. Bob prayed that Malbessa would not look up. Sheena was only fifty feet above the black woman now, but suspended

in midair she would be helpless. And those warriors had bows and arrows as well as spears. Bob tried to hold Malbessa's attention, so she would not glance overhead.

"Sheena will slay you! Sheena is a Queen and she will drive you and your people from the cliffs and the jungle. You will all die!" So he taunted her, laughing, to give Sheena time.

Malbessa, however, had seen his glance. She craned her head upward and hissed a command. "Sheena! Quickly—slay her with your arrows. Hurry, fools."

"Ayieeeeee!" The cry, shrill with rage and defiance, rang and echoed from the cliffs, and Sheena let go her hold on the grass rope and plunged straight downward for the ledge. Bob gasped. If she missed . . .

Sheena did not miss. Like a tawny skinned cat she came down among the surprised throng. She screamed again and her knife flashed in the sunlight. Warriors turned and fled and Sheena was locked in combat with Malbessa. They fell and rolled to the very edge of the stone platform, writhing and straining to plunge their knives into each other. Once Malbessa was atop of Sheena, her knife stabbing downward, and Bob turned his glance. If Sheena were to die . . .

Then came the scream. He looked just in time to see Sheena, in one mighty convulsive effort, hurl Malbessa out into space. The black woman, her face contorted in terror, screamed as she passed the dangling Bob on her way toward the stones below and death.

Sheena did not speak until they were all back in the tree hut. Bob and Chim waited for the flood of her anger, but when she smiled they sighed with relief. Not this time would she give them a tongue lashing.

Her voice was gentle. "You disobeyed Sheena—and evil came. Had I not returned sooner than expected, and followed your spoor, you would have died. Perhaps even Sheena would have died. But in jungle law it it written that all mortals make mistakes, and that they learn from them so they may attain wisdom. And wisdom, Bob, is that in the jungle it is Sheena who knows best."

"Chi—chi—," said little Chim, as though he had known that all along.





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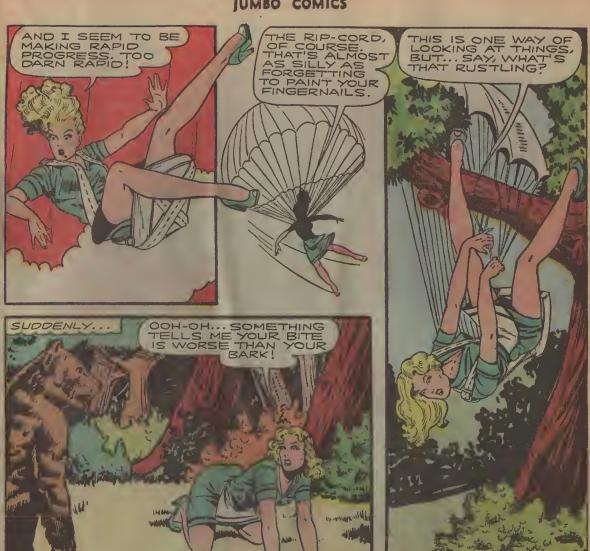
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